

Congressman Elijah E. Cummings

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*A message from
Congressman Elijah E. Cummings*



It is both a privilege and honor to represent you in the United States Congress. While serving you, I will continue outreach efforts to further inform you of legislative action in Congress. I welcome your advice. Government "by the people" is the cornerstone of my legislative philosophy.

*Elijah E. Cummings
Member of Congress*

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Milestones in Election Reform

Congressman Cummings joined in the celebration of two Election Reform milestones in early April.

"This nation is now closer to guaranteeing that all Americans have the opportunity to participate in our great democracy," Congressman Cummings said. "We are hopeful that these changes will prevent another disputed presidential election such as the one that occurred in 2000."

On April 11, the Senate passed election reform legislation that was supported strongly by Congressman Cummings, the Congressional Black Caucus, and several House Democrats.

The Senate bill would give the federal government more authority in overseeing presidential elections. States would be required to improve their election standards to comply with federal mandates. The bill also authorizes \$3.5 billion in grants to meet these requirements.

Previously, Congressman Cummings had cosponsored and voted for the House version of this bill (H.R. 3295, The Help America Vote Act of 2001) that would have provided \$2.65 billion to upgrade the election system and establish a Federal commission to assist local election administrators with standards and rules.

The Senate version, however, would have a greater impact on the nation's election system because these changes

would be mandatory, rather than voluntary, for states.

The Senate and House bills now go to a conference committee where their differences will be reconciled. The conference version then goes back to both Houses for a final vote.

Local Success in Election Reform

Locally, Congressman Cummings commended his former colleagues in the Maryland General Assembly for restoring voting rights to former non-violent offenders who have completed their prison sentences.

"When people have paid their debt to society, they should regain their right to vote. We, as a society, expect former prisoners to get jobs, pay taxes and take care of their families," Congressman Cummings said.

He added, "By restoring their right to vote, the Maryland Legislature has reaffirmed a fundamental American principle: No taxation without representation."

With this action, Maryland joins other progressive states in ensuring that former felons -- except those convicted of violent crimes -- will not be a permanently disenfranchised class.

"I believe that in a democratic society, voting is a fundamental right and a civic duty. Voting is not a privilege to be earned or denied," Congressman Cummings said.

Calling for Meaningful Pension Reform

Joining many of his House Democratic Colleagues, Congressman Cummings voted against the Republican pension reform bill that fails to adequately protect employee pensions and weakens existing protections for employees with savings in 401(k) accounts.

“More than 15,000 Enron employees lost more than \$1.3 billion from their 401(k) retirement accounts when their company collapsed in December,” said Congressman Cummings. “The Republican pension bill fails to address the problems that were brought to light by Enron, and in some ways, even opens new loopholes to protect executives at the expense of workers. The Democratic substitute clearly offers stronger reforms to our pension system.”

The Republican pension reform legislation gives employees little control or voice over their pensions. It allows companies to offer workers investment advice even if there is a clear conflict of interest. In addition, while the measure prohibits insider sale of company stock during blackout periods, the legislation does not require notice of large sales by insiders.

The following are the key components of the Democratic substitute that Congressman Cummings supported:

- Requires employers to provide unbiased, independent investment advice when company stock is offered as an investment option in their 401(k) plan.
- Requires employers to provide timely, honest and accurate information to workers about their 401(k) accounts.
- Requires notice of the importance of a diversified investment portfolio when more than 10 percent of an employee's account is invested in company stock.
- Requires a 30-day notice of blackout periods and gives workers the right to make investment changes in advance of such a period.
- Prohibits executives from selling company stock out of their accounts when workers are prevented from selling during a blackout period.
- Gives employees greater control over their own money in their 401(k) accounts by giving them the right to diversify their portfolios by selling company contributed stock after participating in the plan for three years.
- Gives workers a say in how their pension plans are administered by requiring rank-and-file representation on the boards of plans.
- Puts rank-and-file workers on an equal footing with executives by closing loopholes that provide special treatment for executive pensions when companies file for bankruptcy.

“Pension reform is only the very first step to preventing future Enrons,” said Congressman Cummings. “I am committed to standing up for the hard-working people of this country. Companies and their executives should be held legally accountable for protecting employee pensions and investments.”

For those looking for a new job or a career change..

In less than one week, Congressman Cummings and Baltimore City Community College will be hosting a job fair.

When: Monday, April 22, 2002

Time: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Where: 5th Regiment Armory, 29th Division Street, just off Howard in Baltimore City.

At the job fair, BCCC will conduct workshops on resume writing and presentation skills. Some of the participating employers include banks, retailers, healthcare providers and government agencies.

For information, call (410) 367-1900.

Way To Go, Terps:

After Maryland Terrapins Men's Basketball Team won the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) national championship, Congressman Cummings joined the entire Maryland delegation (in the U.S. House) to pay a special tribute to the team.

The delegation, led by Congressman Steny Hoyer (D-MD-5), sponsored House Resolution 383 which congratulated the team for their win. The resolution, which is a statement of Congress, was passed by the entire House by unanimous consent.

As a graduate of the University of Maryland School of Law, Congressman Cummings complimented the team for its hard work and dedication. He also made some special remarks about guard Juan Dixon (nephew of Baltimore City Council President Sheila Dixon) and head coach Gary Williams. Edited excerpts of Congressman Cummings' remarks on the House Floor are:

“I think the thing that impressed me so much about this team was not just what they did on the court, but it was their demeanor off the court. They were never bragging; they showed a lot of humility and a determination that I have not seen from many teams.

Many of the people in my neighborhood are admirers of the team. Many of them knew Juan Dixon personally. I think the championship inspired a lot of them to be the best that they can be, even under adverse circumstances. So often when we look at a team, we look at the win and loss column. But that is not all that goes into it. This team, especially Juan, broke barriers and inspired a lot of people. So not only is it a great team on the court, but a great team off the court, too.

Head coach Gary Williams puts his soul into this team, and we are certainly very, very proud in the State of Maryland to have such a great team. May God bless all of them, and may God bless the University of Maryland.”
